



One Year-One Regret

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, April 07, 2008

City Hall Diary

The end of March marked my first anniversary as an elected official. As I reflect on my first year in public office, I am amazed at all the different topics I have been involved in as a councilmember. I am pleased that employees who work at companies like Cisco and Adobe are now allowed to volunteer in our parks and that the Rose Garden was adopted by volunteers. I am ecstatic that Coyote Valley has been shelved—for now. I am feeling positive about the evolution of residential towers downtown and saving our city money on technology. The council is making progress with balancing the budget and I enjoyed being part of the efforts of updating the traffic calming policy.

With that said I still have one vote that causes me pain—literally. After reading my blog for a year, do you want to try to guess which one it was?

I think we can all relate to experiencing a bit of trepidation when we start a new position at a company. When you start a new job you inherit what was there before. You might be asked to complete a project; the only problem is that you don't agree with it. It's too late to stop it, promises have been made and people are depending on it to be finalized and it's up to you to see it through. Because you are new, and you don't want to let people down, you do what's expected.

A month into office there was a land use proposal before the council to convert industrial land to housing on Lincoln Avenue. I am against land conversion, as you may know. My gut said no. In fact, it screamed NO! It is not the right decision to convert light industrial land to housing! The loss of jobs! The strain on city resources! STOP! Time Out! Especially when there are large parcels right next to this one already zoned for residential. This particular industrial land was in a much better location than the widely publicized Evergreen industrial land that the council voted down the same night.

As usual, the landowner whined that the land sat vacant for years and that no company wanted to locate there. The problem with that line is that a few months after the vote, a new company called Vocera Communications relocated to San Jose from Cupertino. Vocera, the leader in “instant voice” technology, brought 100 high-wage jobs and a business that produces sales tax. Just think if the land Vocera is now sitting on had been converted to housing. Who knows where Vocera would have ended up. Sunnyvale? Campbell? Santa Clara? Sometimes land needs to sit idle to allow for greater future opportunities.

This project was supported by my predecessor. In fact, District 6 had lots of commercial/industrial land converted to housing in recent years. For example, Fiesta Lanes and Lou’s Village on West San Carlos were both commercial properties. Also, K-Mart on Southwest Expressway/Fruitdale and Del Monte Cannery were on industrial land in the midtown specific plan that got converted to housing—tax revenue-generating land that was lost forever.

In this particular case, we had a savvy property owner and lobbyist that chose to work with the community over an extended period of time regarding design and height, and who was offering amenities like trees. Hold me back: trees, the carrot that gets the community every time. What would we have done without the developer including trees? Well, I recently spoke to the RDA Director and I could have provided the area with trees without having to convert land.

Don’t get me wrong, I don’t blame anyone but myself. Even if I voted “no,” some members of the community supported it. They even showed up and spoke in favor of the project. In reality, my “no” vote may not have made a difference on the council since it was a unanimous vote and the project would most likely have passed.

This is my City Hall diary and I wanted to share with you that I do have regrets. In fact I have had retrospective conversations with other elected officials and they have regrets as well. My diary is open so you see the good and the bad. What I have learned is that I will listen to my gut as I move forward on votes that are best for the future of San Jose—and even promising me trees won’t change me.

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